

Leaving no one behind in an ageing world:

a call to action for the EU



Introduction

Population ageing is happening in every region of the world (see Figure 1). By 2050, there will be more than 2 billion people aged 60 and over, compared with 928 million today. The majority of these older people will live in low- and middle-income countries, rising to four-fifths of the population in these countries by 2050.¹

One of the drivers of population ageing is that people are living longer – a result of advances in healthcare, nutrition, sanitation, education and economic prosperity. The European Union (EU) can be justifiably proud to have made a significant contribution to this achievement as one of the world's largest aid donors.

However, despite the clear statistics, population ageing and increasing longevity are trends that are still largely overlooked in development policy and programming, including in the EU's development cooperation and the current European Consensus on Development. As a result, older people often remain invisible, unrecognised and neglected in development efforts.

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 presents an important opportunity for the EU to step up its response to the phenomenon of population ageing. "Older people" or "people of all ages" are referred to throughout the 17 SDGs, leaving no doubt that people at all stages of their lives must be included in implementation of the SDGs. This must be a key consideration in the EU's implementation of the SDGs within the EU as well as through its external action.

The EU must now work towards a revised European Consensus on Development. This paper by the HelpAge EU Network explores how the revised Consensus must reinforce the strong elements of the current Consensus and how it should establish a clear and ambitious vision for EU development cooperation in line with the new Sustainable Development Goals framework. This will guide the EU to deliver an effective response to important global trends such as population ageing.

This paper addresses some of the priority issues in older people's lives, including income security, access to health care and gender inequalities in older age. It also highlights some core commitments necessary to ensure that development is inclusive of all people of all ages, such as a rights-based approach to development and the disaggregation of data.



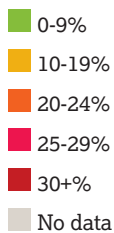
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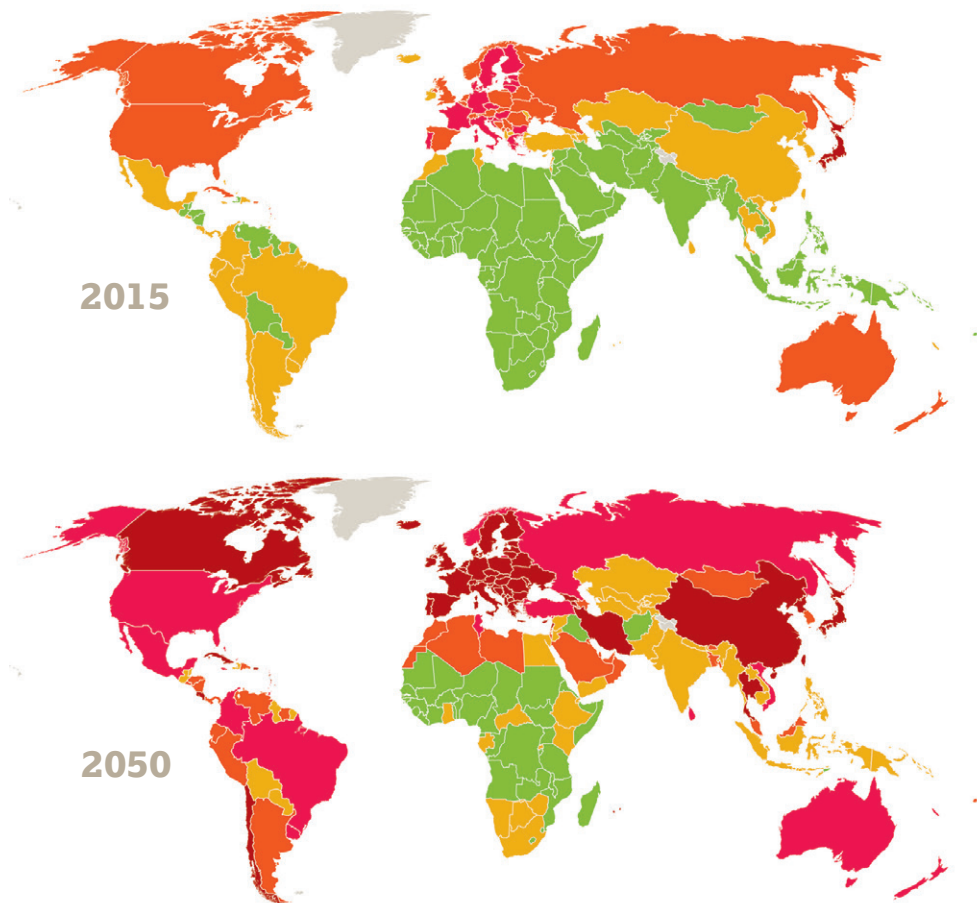
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Figure 1: Proportion of population aged 60 or over in 2015 and 2050



Source: UNDESA Population Division, *World population prospects: the 2015 revision*, DVD Edition, 2015



HelpAge EU Network

The HelpAge EU Network is an alliance of diverse organisations with a common interest in improving the lives of older people worldwide and putting global ageing on the international development agenda.

With support from the EU, the HelpAge EU Network is influencing policy and public opinion at Member State, EU and international levels to include ageing in the development policies and programmes of the EU and its Member States, particularly in the areas of social protection, gender and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Together with other regional networks across the globe, the HelpAge EU Network makes up the HelpAge Global Network, a unique worldwide alliance standing up for the rights of older people.

Reducing poverty: promoting social pensions

Poverty is one of the main threats to older people’s wellbeing worldwide. In low- and middle-income countries, the majority of older people are denied their right to a secure income, and only one in four people over the age of 65 receives a pension.² Those who can no longer work, or are prevented from working by discriminatory practices such as mandatory retirement ages, are more likely to become or remain poor.

Social protection features in a number of the SDGs, particularly Goal 1 and Target 1.3, which commits to implementing national social protection systems, including social protection floors. Social pensions are a core part of any social protection system, helping to tackle income inequality and support economic growth. They are critical to ensuring that older people have the income they need to live with dignity. Social pensions can also contribute to reducing household poverty.

Since the current European Consensus on Development was adopted, the EU has built up an increased understanding and commitment to social protection in its development cooperation. The EC Communication on Social Protection in Development Cooperation of 2012 supports universal, rights-based national social protection floors that address a range of life-cycle risks as set out in the ILO Recommendation 202 (R202 – Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012).

The EC Communication “A Decent Life For All: Ending poverty and giving the world a sustainable future” in February 2013 also recognises pensions as an area where greater efforts will be required in developing countries in the context of their ageing populations. Since then, references to social protection floors have been consistently present in the EU’s policies and positions relating to the SDGs.

Through the revision of the 2005 European Consensus on Development, the EU has the opportunity to reinforce its existing commitments to supporting the achievement of Target 1.3 and the implementation of national social protection floors in partner countries. It also has the opportunity to further strengthen the profile of social protection in development cooperation.

Empowering older women in Tanzania

Older women in Mwanza, north-west Tanzania are changing their lives through a project funded by the EU.

A combination of age discrimination, gender inequality and economic disempowerment puts older women at risk of financial exploitation and physical violence, sometimes even murder. In some cases, abuse is not investigated and perpetrators never brought to justice.

HelpAge International and Magu Poverty Eradication Rehabilitation Center are supporting a range of measures to challenge these harmful discriminatory behaviours in two districts of Mwanza.

Seminars have been held for older women to learn about their human rights. Village workshops, theatre, campaigns and media training are reaching wider audiences. Local government leaders, police and judicial officers are also being supported to safeguard the rights of older women.

“It’s important that people in the community understand that older men and women are not different – it’s just another stage of life.”

Debora, older woman, Tanzania

Ensuring healthy lives: tackling non-communicable diseases

Global investment and advancements in public health have contributed significantly to rapid population ageing as more people survive infancy and live longer lives. This demographic shift towards older populations has major implications for health and care policies and service delivery. In particular, population ageing is associated with the growth in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes and dementia.

NCDs are now the largest cause of illness and death in most low- and middle- income countries.³ Older people are disproportionately affected, with people aged over 60 accounting for 71 per cent of deaths from NCDs in low- and middle-income countries.⁴ Many of these deaths could be prevented, yet healthcare systems often fail to respond to the health and care needs of their ageing populations.

The SDGs include a goal focusing specifically on health, Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages. Goal 3 has 13 targets addressing the spectrum of diseases, including NCDs, and the systems and infrastructure needed to achieve health and wellbeing. Investment in NCD prevention, treatment, management and care for people of all ages is critical to realising the SDGs, particularly Goal 3.

The EU has identified a central role for itself in advancing progress on global health challenges, which is set out in the EC Communication and Council conclusions on the role of the EU in Global Health in 2010⁵ and the EC Communication “An Agenda for Change” in 2011.

In order to support the full realisation of Goal 3, the EU must ensure in the revised European Consensus on Development that the implications of population ageing are fully reflected in its support to strengthen health systems and ensure access to quality health services for all people of all ages.

Promoting human rights: putting an end to ageism

Ageism (negative stereotypes and attitudes towards older age and older people) occurs in all regions of the world. It continues to go unrecognised, ignored, tolerated and sometimes even condoned.

Discrimination in older age can be complex. Older people may be subjected to discrimination on different grounds, such as their age, sex or marital status. They may also be subjected to unique forms of discrimination created by the intersection between two or more forms of discrimination at the same time, such as their gender and older age. Furthermore, for people who have experienced discrimination at earlier points in their life or throughout their life, the cumulative impact of years of discrimination can have a much greater impact in older age.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Declaration is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties. Another key feature of the debates on the SDGs has been the pledge to leave no one behind – the idea of reaching those furthest behind first. The idea that “no Goal should be met unless it is met for everyone” is well established in the rhetoric around the SDGs. This means ensuring that every individual enjoys all the rights that underpin the SDGs.

The EU has a number of tools to enable it to translate this commitment into practice through its development cooperation. In 2014, the “Council conclusions on a rights-based approach to development cooperation, encompassing all human rights”, reaffirmed the EU’s commitment to promoting all human rights in all areas of its external action without exception. The conclusions support the rights-based approach to development cooperation as defined by the EC’s Toolbox, which sets out the core principles and steps required to apply the approach successfully. The principle of non-discrimination includes age as one of the forms of discrimination listed.

In July 2015, the EU adopted its EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019 covering its external action. This Action Plan includes an action dedicated to “increasing awareness of the human rights and specific needs of older persons paying particular attention to age based discrimination”.

The EU must ensure through its revised European Consensus on Development that these existing commitments and tools relating to human rights are fully maximised and implemented in its external action. This is necessary to build a solid foundation for further work to elaborate and strengthen the understanding of the principles of a rights-based approach and how to apply them.

1. UNDESA, *World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision*, DVD Edition
2. International Labour Organization, *Old-age effective coverage: old age pension beneficiaries*, ILO, 2014, www.ilo.org/gimi/gess/ShowTheme.do?tid=10 (17 July 2014)
3. WHO, Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in developing countries: a symposium report, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4267750 (14 July 2016). Sub-Saharan Africa remains the exception, though even here, NCDs are accounting for a rapidly increasing share of mortality and morbidity.
4. United Nations, *Prevention and Control of Non-communicable diseases: report of the Secretary-General, 2011*
5. http://ec.europa.eu/health/eu_world/policy/index_en.htm (20 September 2016)

HelpAge International is a global network of organisations promoting the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives.

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Front page photo: One of the women involved in an EU-funded project in Mwanza, Tanzania to empower older women. Photo by Clemence Eliah/HelpAge International

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Achieving gender equality: including older women

Discrimination based on gender often intersects with discrimination on the grounds of other characteristics, such as age, ability, marital status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class and social status. The intersection of gender- and age-based discrimination results in people being subjected to new and distinct forms of discrimination in older age, and can amplify gender inequality. This is particularly the case for older women and especially for widows.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are addressed in SDG Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. There is also an understanding that gender-related issues must underpin all the goals. Many of the targets for Goal 5, such as freedom from discrimination, economic empowerment, health promotion and eliminating violence, are also crucial to the achievement of other goals, including Goals 1 and 3.

The EU has already indicated its support for gender equality across the life course. The EU's Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 goes a step further than Goal 5 in explicitly reinforcing the language on "girls and women of all ages" from the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It also recognises the need to analyse and address the multiple forms of discrimination that many girls and women are subjected to.

A new European Consensus on Development presents an important opportunity to go beyond the existing commitments of the Gender Action Plan 2016-2020. It must ensure clear support and adequate resources for the full mainstreaming of gender across the EU's development cooperation aimed at tackling all forms of discrimination against girls and women of all ages. This must take place alongside a range of targeted actions, including where necessary specific actions supporting older women.

Monitoring and accountability: data across the life course

Many of the population-based surveys used to monitor development progress do not collect data above age 49. This means that the exclusion of older people and their experience of discrimination are rarely understood. Regular reviews on progress towards the SDGs should be based on a robust national indicator process that captures data across the life course and is disaggregated by age, sex, disability and other characteristics outlined in Target 17.18.

During the Agenda 2030 negotiation process, many European governments championed more robust accountability mechanisms to oversee implementation of the SDGs. The EU can further support the strengthening of accountability mechanisms at national level by investing in social accountability programming which strengthens the accountability relationship and also provides valuable citizen-generated data on the quality of services to enhance official statistics. Civil society also has a unique role to play in monitoring the commitment to leave no one behind.

The process of reviewing the European Consensus on Development must include a clear recognition of the important role that the EU must play, not only in meeting its own commitments to collect data disaggregated by age, sex, disability and other characteristics as set out in Target 17.18, but also in stepping up support for the development of partner countries' statistical capacity and ability to meet these commitments.

The EU should ensure adequate investment in the capacity of civil society actors to engage in review processes at national and local levels through the provision of funding to civil society organisations and networks, and should further champion the important role of civil society actors in global and regional processes.

